

How Did Christianity Begin?

James Crossley on the Resurrection

Crossley begins by asking concerning the resurrection: 'how on earth [can it] be historically proven that a thing like that actually happened' (p. 51), and of course he's right. The resurrection cannot be proven historically. Proof resides in the realm of the intellect and is thereby completely limited by intellect. Crossley continues, '... in terms of conventional historical reconstruction the bodily resurrection should be dismissed as a historical event' to which I reply indeed so. But then again, conventional historical reconstruction is crippled and lame and blind and mute and dumb on such a massive range of issues that it most surely cannot be viewed as the end of the matter.

Having laid his presuppositional foundation James launches into his unsurprisingly negative (and I don't mean this negatively) opinion on the reality of the resurrection. For while I agree, of course, that history cannot provide sufficient proof for the event, as stated above, I have to suggest that such proof is neither necessary nor even desirable. James examines in this connection 1 Corinthians 15:3ff of which he states 'All this proves is that certain people believed they saw Jesus, not that Jesus was really raised from the dead in a way that defies the laws of nature' (p. 52). Again, he is correct. All in the world that the New Testament narratives of the resurrection 'prove' is that some believe. Some don't. The mere fact that some don't believe doesn't make the event any 'falsier' than the fact that some do believe makes it 'truer'.

Next James takes in hand Mark 16:1ff which serves as the other New Testament 'proof' of the resurrection. He insists that the ending of the Gospel (in verse 8) shows the women telling no one. He seems to imply, unless I have misunderstood him, that they don't tell anyone anything because there's really nothing to tell. This is where James demonstrates himself no preacher. And Mark was preeminently exactly that, for the ending of the Gospel is not only intentional, it is intentionally abrupt and forces the reader/ hearer to gasp in disbelief. 'What?? The women remained silent? Well I can't, so I will go and tell the world that Jesus is alive!'

What I'm suggesting here is that the ending of the Gospel is a challenge to the hearers to do what the women didn't do. To be sure, it takes a bit of creative imagination to read the ending of the Gospel that way- but that is precisely what a preacher would do. And, again, since Mark was a preacher it makes more sense to read him as a preacher than as a skeptic.

James continues a bit further along by suggesting that 'There is plenty of evidence that the first Christians were immersed in the world of creative storytelling that had minimal grounding in history' (p. 56). Had he only replaced 'storytelling' with 'theologizing' we would once more be in agreement.

At the end of this round Crossley offers a few of the usual Evangelical arguments for the resurrection and rebuts them. After talking about women as reliable or unreliable witnesses he mentions, in just a couple of paragraphs, the notion that Jews weren't expecting a suffering Messiah. While this may be true of the way many Evangelicals argue, Crossley's argument is weakened a bit because he fails to mention, even in passing, the famous Dead Sea Scrolls which do in fact mention a suffering messiah. Had he presented this bit of evidence he could have completely undermined the argument.

James is an excellent writer and though this really has nothing to do with his point, at the bottom of page 61 he writes this delicious line in connection with Evangelical argument that Jesus' empty tomb wasn't venerated nor a place of pilgrimage- 'They certainly do not mean we should go all supernatural on the evidence'. That's brilliant! '... go all supernatural on the evidence...' Fantastic!

Crossley ends by offering an example from a Sherlock Holmes tale and saying 'So whose example do you want to follow: the supreme rationalist or the deluded villagers believing in vampires without seriously trying to seek alternative explanations?' (p. 63).

I don't wish to follow the supreme rationalist or the deluded villagers. Surely there's a third alternative. The sharp distinction between the 'whore reason' (my favorite line from Luther) and the moronic, slack jawed, mouth breathing, inbred village idiot surely doesn't represent reality any more than McKnight's reconstructed Jesus or Crossley's deconstructed Jesus.

Next, Crossley on Paul.